

Red Hill, Privy
Patrick Henry National Memorial
Brookneal Vicinity
Charlotte County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1034-E

HABS
VA,
20-BROOK,
1-E-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RED HILL - PRIVY (Patrick Henry National Memorial)

HABS No. VA-1034-E

Location: Approximately 1.1 miles south of State Route 619, 5.3 miles south^{east} of Brookneal, in Charlotte County, Virginia.

Present Owner/Occupant: Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation.

Significance: Red Hill was the final home and burial site of Patrick Henry (1736-99), prominent Revolutionary War and early national patriot, politician, orator, and lawyer. Henry was a leader in provoking and organizing resistance to British government of the colonies. He served as governor of Virginia five times in the 1770-80s, during the American Revolution and its aftermath, and led the opposition to ratifying the U.S. Constitution in Virginia in 1788. He thereafter withdrew from state politics and resumed a successful law practice. Henry occupied Red Hill from 1794 until 1799, when he died. Red Hill is a 1950s interpretation of a typical well-to-do eighteenth-century planter's home in Southside Virginia. While this building is alleged to represent the original Henry privy, there is no evidence of how this dependency appeared.

In 1978 the U.S. Department of the Interior recognized Red Hill as a national landmark and entered the property in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1986 the property was designated a National Memorial to Patrick Henry by an act of Congress.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** The original Patrick Henry plantation was built at least by 1794; the much-altered and enlarged dwelling burned in February 1919. Reconstruction of the privy was completed in 1956.
2. **Architect:** Stanhope Johnson designed the reconstruction.
3. **Original plans and construction:** A copy of Stanhope Johnson's 1956 reconstruction plans are on file in the Red Hill archives. All buildings at Red Hill date from the restoration/reconstruction.

- ##### B. Historical Context:
- The eighteenth-century designation of a privy dependency varied from a spare, small service building, to buildings as formal as the one at Red Hill. One consistency is placement far enough from the dwelling to avoid unpleasant odor or contamination, yet close enough to be accessible during the winter. This structure is believed to be a copy of a building observed and measured by Stanhope Johnson at another late eighteenth-century site, although no record of this has been located.

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This privy is an eccentric, triaxially symmetric form to allow separate seating areas divided by an open space. The beaded weatherboard structure, brick foundations and flagstone reflect, however, an extravagant display of materials given the scale of the plantation.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The privy consists of dual "seating" spaces sharing a common foundation and roof. The foundation measures 6'-6" x 10'-0", each privy space is 6'-6" x 4'-0".
2. Foundations: Brick laid in Flemish bond; five courses of brick are exposed beneath the structure.
3. Walls: The walls are clad with lapped and beaded horizontal weatherboards, each with ca. 4-3/8" exposure and cornermolding.
4. Structural systems, framing: Wood frame.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways, doors: Each privy has a single entry: the north unit on its north face, the south unit on its south face. Both are accessed by flagstone steps. The privy doors are board-and-batten construction. A thick wood dowel protrudes from the facade adjacent to the door frame, some 6' above the foundation.
 - b. Windows, shutters: On the west facade, at the base of each unit, is a single rectangular fixed-louver vent. Each unit also features double wood doors at the base of the east facade, that access a small chamber beneath the seats. Earthenware pots to collect the waste would have been placed in these chambers and emptied each day.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Hipped with the ridge oriented north to south; wood shingles lapped at the ridge.

- b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves are ornamented with shingle and bed molding.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Each unit contains a pair of seats attached to the east wall; the seats have wood covers; one seat is 18-1/2" high, the other is 15-0" high.
2. Flooring: Flagstone.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Horizontal, fitted (yet coarsely finished) 5-1/2" boards.
4. Doorways and doors: Vertical plank.
5. Hardware: The cast-iron box locks on the doors were made by James Peterson and Sons of Philadelphia. Other items include long V-shaped hinges attached to the privy doors and to the access doors to the chambers beneath the seats, and door handles (the door handle to the north unit is missing). A cast-iron boot scraper is located at the south entrance.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The privy is southeast of the dwelling with its entrances on the north and south facades. It is the second in a row of dependencies that are linearly perpendicular to the ridgeline and orientation of the dwelling; to the east is a lawn and garden area, and the cemetery. North of the privy is the kitchen, to the south is the smokehouse.
2. Outbuildings: Besides the privy, the estate includes the dwelling and five primary outbuildings that are described in individual reports: Addendum to law office, VA-1034-A; kitchen, VA-1034-C; smokehouse, VA-1034-D; stables and carriage house, VA-1034-F; and slave cabin, VA-1034-G.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION: See Dwelling report, VA-1034-B.